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Report of a visit by Catherine Scott

Confidential

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Present situation in East Timor

The situation in East Timor remains as tense as ever. The Indonesian troops occupying the territory seem to become more rather than less numerous, in spite of official Indonesian government pronouncments of troop withdrawals. The atmosphere can quickly transform from one of superficial peacefulness to confrontation. During the week I was there, Dili was quiet, but there were reports of an attempted desecration in the Catholic Church in Same. This does not seem to have been widely reported outside. The version I heard was that Indonesian soldiers had attempted to break open the tabernacle in the church, and this had been met with violent retaliatory action from Catholics, and the local Mosque had been burnt. I was not able to corroborate this version of events. There was disappointment over the lack of progress at the All-Inclusive Intra-East Timorese Dialogue which had been held under UN auspices in Austria in March. The week after I left Timor there were reports of three separate killings of Timorese by the Indonesian military, in Aileu, Comoro and Baucau (28/4/96). In spite of the desperate situation, not only of conflict and repression, but also of disease, unemployment, disallusionment, I was able to visit some very encouraging projects and initiatives, and for the first time be able to talk to some Timorese women about their lives and struggles. It was the women, particularly, who gave me hope in what seems like an otherwise hopeless situation: their spirit, grit and determination was a real testimony to the resilience of the East Timorese as a people.

Purpose of visit

The main purpose of my visit this time was to report back to East Timorese partners in the Christian churches, following the January 1996 Christian Consultation on East Timor. I flew into Dili from Denpasar on 16th April. I experienced no particular difficulties in entering Indonesia at Denpasar, nor Dili. I stayed at the Turismo hotel, which appeared quite full, with a larger number of western visitors than I have experienced on my two previous visits. Subsequent enquiries revealed that the visitors ranged from teams from US and AUS aid, a German private telecommunications company to a journalist from Der Spiegel on an official programme. I was joined half-way through my visit by Pat Gaffney of Pax Christi UK, and we had more or less a joint programme until I left on Monday 22 April, leaving Pat in Timor for another week.

17/5/96

Armindo Maia, University of Timor Timur

Armindo Maia studied in New Zealand for three years, before returning to East Timor a couple of years ago to teach at the University. He was vice-rector, and is now being considered for the post of Rector. He informed me that a vote of the governing body had taken place, and that he had received one more vote than his rival. He is waiting to see whether his appointment is to be confirmed. It has been recognised by those of all points of view that it would be a positive move to have an East Timorese rector, yet Armindo has demonstrated his capacity for independence - the decision will therefore be interesting. In the post his principal concern would be to raise the academic level so that the university would rate alongside some of the better universities in Indonesia.

At UNTIM, women account for 25% of the teaching staff. There are 2,000 students, of which 65% are male. It is funded by local government.

Armindo, along with Florentino Sarmento were both participants at the All-Inclusive Intra-East Timorese dialogue. Both had been summoned to Jakarta ahead of the meeting to talk with Ali Alatas. He would have wanted to warn them against making any statements which would embarrass the government. Armindo was able to speak to the foreign minister about the needs of the University and secure greater support.

As confirmed from other sources, the AIIET was extremely difficult, slow moving and frustrating, and according to Armindo, the absence of the Bishop meant that the delegation from inside did not find the courage to speak out. He himself had been very quiet, but had felt very angry at the behaviour of Lopes da Cruz, Indonesia's East Timorese stooge, who had dominated the meeting, refusing to speak anything but Tetum so that the UN officials could not understand what he said, and running to consult with two Indonesian advisors on frequent occasions. The outcome of the meeting, as has been seen, was a very short and bland statement, which only received all the signatures after the participants decided that whatever the lack of progress, they had to demonstrate a united front. Some of the more militant Timorese from outside East Timor were very reluctant to sign it and had to be persuaded by some of their colleagues from inside.

Rev. **Arlindo Marcal**, Hosanna Church, Gereja Kristen Timor Timur (GKTT).
Rev. Arlindo Marcal came to the consultation on East Timor organised by the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia in Hong Kong in December 1994.
He surprised those present, and angered his colleagues from the Indonesian Communion of Churches, by echoing Bishop Belo's concerns about East Timor, and about the need for the problem to be recognised, discussed properly and dealt with in consultation with the people. Since then, he has travelled to North America and Australia, and has made several very 'independent' speeches on the East Timorese situation.

Arlindo informed me that the GKTT is now 80% indigenous, and, barring a few Apodeti families, most of the East Timorese who come to the church are nationalist in their political sympathies. This obviously creates considerable problems within the church itself, but Arlindo is trying to encourage East Timorese to find their voices, particularly in the church structures. In the forthcoming July synodal elections, Arlindo, who himself is up for renomination as chairperson, is hopeful that a few more young East Timorese pastors will be elected onto the council of 13. At present there are only 3. The rest are Indonesians. It will be interesting to see whether Arlindo himself is re-elected after what he has been saying outside.

In discussion about ecumenical cooperation within East Timor, Rev. Arlino felt that the young East Timorese pastors were more open to ecumenical contact, and had been encouraging them to make contact with Catholic clergy where possible, to cooperate on initiatives. He told me that the first time Bishop Belo visited him at his Church offices was when Bishop Guazzelli from London was visiting, and had expressed the desire to go and meet him. They came together. The reality remains, however, that the building up trust between two very different traditions with a great deal of historical baggage behind them, will be slow. Many of the Catholic priests and sisters I spoke to did not appear to know that the GKTT was mostly composed of fellow Timorese.

In the meantime, in view of recent violent outbreaks which the Indonesian government has sought to present as religious tension, the Indonesian minister for religion was dispatched to Timor at the end of last year to inaugurate an inter-religious forum - the government's attempt at imposing religious harmony from above. It was looked upon with scepticism by most religious leaders, and Bishop Belo refused to sign up, sending Fr. Sequeira, the Chancellor of the diocese in his place.

18/5/96

Day trip to **Aileu**: to visit Maryknoll sisters Nora Maulanan, Dorothy McGowan and Susan Gubbins, MM.

This group of American Maryknoll sisters moved to East Timor from Bandung, where they had been working for some time, five years ago. They have settled into Aileu parish, and after a period of discernment about how they would contribute, it became clear that there was need in the field of basic health care, nutrition, and related training. They have set up a number of projects which involve training local women to be health motivators in their respective villages. They have been trained by the sisters to keep a watch on primary health care, and to oversee the diets of pregnant women. The sisters contribute food supplements where necessary, trying to diversify the women's diets, so that vitamin deficiency can be minimised. They have also begun to try to persuade women not to give birth in the kitchen of their homes and stay close to the smokey fires for forty days afterwards. The nuns themselves run a basic polyclinic, and administer medicines to the sick, with financial support from Delsos, the diocesan development office.

Evening with Rev. Arlindo Marcal

This turned out to provide an interesting insight into the life of the GKTT. It proved to be a fundraising benefit evening, aiming at raising Rupiah 9m for the church. Arlindo, visibly the only East Timorese present when we arrived sat us down on the top table near the stage. Gradually the room began to fill with well dressed Indonesians. Singers began to take the stage, including a schmaltzy gospel singer imported from Java for the occasion called Melky Goeslaw. Why bring someone all the way from Java, I wondered? But the man's gifts in extorting money from recalcitrant parishioners quickly proved his worth. Having been softened up by a young female evangelist from North Kalimantan, rupiah started to be signed away at a steady rate, and by the end of the evening, the target figure had been exceeded. Two thirds of the way through I realised that Arlindo was still the only East Timorese in the room. 'Where are the Timorese?' I asked him. 'Well you need money to come to one of these events' was the reply. The 80% clearly did not qualify.

19/5/96

Delsos Office

Sister **Gabriela Soldi**

I had an hour's meeting with Sister Gabriela Soldi, the Canossian Sister who runs the Delsos Office. She was joined by staffers Rogerio and Laura. On my visit last September, Gabriela informed me that she would be leaving in February to take up the task of supervising the novices in her order. This has been put back, as the new director, Fr. Barreto, has gone to the Philippines to undertake a management training course. He does not return until November. Sr. Gabriela has been asked to hold the fort until then. Discussing ecumenical

action with the younger staff, I noticed a lot more receptiveness on their part than I had encountered on the part of older priests and religious. They told me that there had been cooperation at lay levels recently, and that they did think improving contact was possible. Nevertheless Sister Gabriela was sceptical that noticeable progress in this domain was likely to happen very quickly.

Discussion with East Timorese Women.

This meeting was arranged by two of the priests. Pat Gaffney and I were able to meet women relatives of an East Timorese political prisoner currently being held in prison in Indonesia.

These were tough and impressive women. We were very moved to hear their tales of suffering, and to hear how East Timorese women are managing to survive in spite of the immense hardships brought about by the consequences of the occupation. We were told that the greatest fear the women have vis-a-vis the Indonesian soldiers is the prospect of being raped, which is a frequent occurrence. Even then, they stated categorically, 'they can take our bodies, but they do not remove our souls, our identity, our integrity'.

They tried to convey to us the impossibility of women organising amongst themselves in any way to resist what is happening to them. Often Indonesian soldiers are assigned to live in their homes - meaning total control over their families. Any attempt at holding a meeting is construed as political and stopped. Even the parents of boys belonging to a local scout troop wishing to meet to discuss scout matters were prevented from meeting, so a women's group would be quite impossible.

We asked them what kept them going. They spoke of the importance of the church, of being able to pour out their unhappiness to the priest, of their faith, and of their determination not to give in to the oppressor. They spoke of the forced sterilisation, administered in the schools by injection, and the penalties meted out to women who have more than two children. Apparently no maternity leave is granted for a third child - they have to go straight back to work if they are employed by the local government. There are also no schooling subsidies for more than two children. But many women try not to take any notice, aware of the governments aim of reducing their numbers.

They were sad that their family member in Prison was so far away from them - they are only allowed to visit him twice a year. We asked if there were any women in prison in East Timor and they told us about Felismina dos Santos da Conceicao. We were given a copy of her testimony. We were also told of a women prisoner who had been tortured by the military by having a poisonous snake inserted in her vagina.

We told them of the action carried out by the four women in Britain, who had broken into British Aerospace factory and smashed up a Hawk trainer jet being prepared as a part of the fleet of 24 bought by Indonesia. They were especially impressed when we told them how unpleasant their lives were being made whilst on remand, and asked us to convey their immense gratitude for their solidarity. The East Timorese women decided to write to the four women - I was able to convey their communication to the women prisoners back in Britain.

The parting message from our interlocutors was that East Timorese women are going to keep up the struggle, whatever the cost, for their loved ones, for their freedom, and for the

independence of East Timor. 'East Timorese women are strong', they told us. We will keep on fighting for the independence of our country, we will not give up'.

2.30pm: Meeting with **Florentino Sarmento**, ETADEP
Florentino is Catholic lay development worker, and has been working with ETADEP for some years, the successor to Catholic Relief Services. He is about to become an independent development consultant, however, and is likely to be going to the USA to study at Cornell in the near future. Known as favourable to 'autonomy' rather than 'independence', Florentino is nevertheless no Indonesian flunky. He appears to command considerable respect, not only from the Timorese, but also from the Indonesians, who invariably send foreign visitors to see him in the belief that he will not give a one-sided view.

Pat and I spent some time explaining our respective organisations and our work. We were particularly interested in talking to him on questions of religious harmony, given the tensions of the recent past and he told us of a meeting which he had personally been involved in organising back on January 8th. This had involved inviting Muslim speakers and guests to Timor to talk about Islam, as well as fielding speakers to speak about Catholicism. Protestants had been invited, but it appears that the invitation was lost on the way, and they did not attend, although they would have liked to. The day was immensely successful according to Florentino, and this was largely owing to the fact that it was a home-grown initiative, not a military or state imposition. He agreed that attempts like the inter-religious forum recently imposed by Indonesia, would not work.

Asking him about the AIIETD in Austria, he expressed his deep frustration at the pedantry involved in spending four hours trying to agree two words in a statement. He characterised himself as a development worker, not a diplomat. Like Armindo, he condemned the way in which Lopes da Cruz had sought to control and limit discussion, especially when he spoke on behalf of 'We Indonesians' meaning the delegation from inside. He did however, play an important role in persuading some of the more independence minded delegates from outside to sign the document at the end, explaining that this was the reality of East Timor - feeling 'hamstrung' by circumstances, and going along with things in the hope of righting them at a future date.

4.00pm: Open air Mass at Motael Church
It was good to go to Mass celebrated in Tetum. This was the church from which emanated the procession to Santa Cruz Cemetery on 12 November 1991. It is a striking church, visible across the bay for miles, with its elegantly pointed four arches at the front. The mass was very orthedox apart from the fact that there were several girl altar servers. This was a surprise given that plenty of churches in considerably more ecclesiastically liberal Catholic countries in the world have yet to act on the Vatican unbanning of female altar servers.

Sunday 21/4/96
Meeting with Bishop Belo
A number of anti-Belo articles had featured in the Muslim press that week following a very hard-hitting article carried by an Italian journalist in the Corriera della Sera. Two Indonesian diplomats had been formally dispatched to the newspapers Rome-based offices to complain. Bishop Belo said that no official complaint had yet been directly made to him. What had outraged the government most was the Bishop's expressed intention, in the article, to have

nothing to do with the inauguration of the statue of Christ, donated by Garuda Airlines, currently under construction in Dili. The statue has been constructed within the context of Pancasila, using measurements and figures of significance to Indonesia, and the government intends it to be inaugurated on 17th July, 'integration' day.

Pat and I visited the Bishop together, and had an hour with him. His main project at present seemed to be the new minor seminary, and plans for the new major seminary, now that permission has been obtained to build it. Asked about his non-attendance at the Austria talks, the Bishop told us that he saw not point in attending as the document agreed last year had not been implemented.

Visit to Radio Kamanek with Fr. Sequeira

Pat and I had another long talk with Fr.Sequeira about the radio station, and then he took us there to see the new equipment they have had installed. It is a great improvement. The new transmitter has the capacity to reach Darwin, although they are not allowed to broadcast that far away. Fourteen staff are now employed, and they manage to relay a good variety of material, including programmes in Tetum and once a week in Portuguese. Fr. Sequeira is still engaged in a tussle with the government over the granting of the broadcasting licence. He needs this in order to broadcast advertising, which could bring in some funding for the station. It is mostly young adults who listen in in the early evenings. They manage to broadcast news items in between the record slots, which is a good way of keeping people informed of world events, although they cannot attempt analysis.

22/4/96

Meeting with **Fr. Basilio.**

Fr. Basilio recently returned to Eat Timor after spending most of the last twenty five years in a seminary in Lisbon. Fr. Basilio was interested when I said I had come to understand more of the East Timorese reality: He asked me which one, because he had found about twenty different East Timorese realities depending on who you were. I understood what he meant. Fr. B. will be in charge of getting the Major seminary off the ground, now Rome has approved the plans. A site has already been identified near Dare, and building will start soon. In the meantime, an old building along the Dili sea front will be used.

Visit to Dare retreat centre, and Dare secular institute with Fr. Domingos.

Maria Lourdes Martins Cruz dropped out of the novitiate of the Canossian sisters, and decided that her calling was to set up a Secular institute. Her work has been tireless and now there are three different centres, one in Dare, one in Aileu and one in Baucau, where young women take vows and go out into the community to live out their vocations there. Dare, a simple centre consisting of a couple of classrooms, a chapel and living accommodation, has three different groups of eight women in preparation at the moment. They go to the villages, and teach literacy, health care, and basic nutrition, and through this empowerment. Living among the communities, they are valuable resource. Occasionally they come back together to their centre to reflect on their lives and work. It is firmly rooted in a deep and reflective spirituality, which must benefit from the inspiring beauty of the centre's location, overlooking Dili from the mountainside. Pat and I were both very impressed with Lourdes' sense of vocation and mission. From what we could ascertain, it receives no official support from the local Church, which is preoccupied at present with the

setting up of seminaries. We felt that we would like to publicise the initiative much more widely and try to gather support from women's organisations outside.